A *Historikerstreit?* A Reply to Nathan Stoltzfus's Response

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DURING the brutal factory raid at the end of February 1943, the Gestapo rounded up thousands of Berlin Jews at their forced labor sites and brought them to various collection points. The Gestapo immediately singled out two thousand Jews in "mixed marriages" and transferred them to a separate building in the Rosenstrasse. The traditional view of the events, which Stoltzfus promotes, is that after a week-long demonstration by their relatives, Goebbels ordered the release of the inmates on March 6, 1943. Based on a variety of hitherto overlooked documents, I provided the reader with a different interpretation in my *Central European History* article: that special Gestapo orders at this point still exempted the Jews in mixed marriages from deportation. I argue that the real purpose of the arrest was to facilitate the deportation of hundreds of employees of Berlin's Jewish institutions who would be replaced by the Jews in mixed marriages. This interpretation forces us to reconsider key elements of the traditional account.

Unfortunately, Stoltzfus's response does not engage with my main arguments. Instead, he cites prominent historians such as Richard Evans and Richard Bessel in support of his own interpretation of the Rosenstrasse events. The citations are from reviews of Stoltzfus's book, *Resistance of the Heart: Intermarriage and the Rosenstrasse Protest in Nazi Germany*, a point that is not at all clear from the footnotes. In fact, the book's argument is built upon the claim that Joseph Goebbels ordered the release of the Jewish men held in the Rosenstrasse on March 6, after the women's protest had embarrassed the regime, a claim which my article refutes. In his response, Stoltzfus no longer defends this position, nor does he defend the book's principle conclusion that if more Germans had behaved like the Rosenstrasse protesters, they would have stopped the genocide of German Jews.

Instead of using evidence to defend against specific challenges to his thesis—which would be indispensable for a debate deserving the prominent label "*Historikerstreit*"—Stoltzfus goes on the offensive, attacking the overall integrity of my research. He accuses me of reaching conclusions about the Rosenstrasse *before* doing the research. This is simply not true: First results of this research

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were already presented in my 1994 dissertation and then published with substantial evidence in an article on Berlin in 1995.[1] He then accuses me of promoting top-down history, which is absurd, given that most of my work is dedicated to demonstrating the decentralized, bottom-up nature of the anti-Jewish persecutions. In my books on the Nazi Regime, I describe in detail how local initiatives were responsible for a radicalization of anti-Jewish policies since 1933.[2]

The history of the deportations, however, is the wrong example to test this rule. To prevent disruption of the war economy, the Nazi state needed to set the mass transports in motion by central coordination. Hitler himself determined the time, extent, locations, and even destinations for various mass transports. In Berlin, Eichmann planned the deportations on orders from Himmler and Heydrich. The Reich Security Main Office then informed the regional State Police headquarters about victim criteria and quotas, transport dates and places. In significant contrast to other anti-Jewish policies, such as forced labor and ghettoization, local initiatives played hardly any role in the course of the deportations. The local Gestapo's only authority was over selection, collection, and transfer of the individual victim.[3] Hence, only the Nazi leadership could make a decision in 1943 to deport all Jews in mixed marriages. The RSHA guidelines from February 20, 1943, and several Gestapo decrees from around February 24 clearly demonstrate that the actual aim was to deport all so-called "full Jews" except—for the time-being—those Jews living in mixed marriages. The RSHA-guidelines were not changed during the time of the big raid, as I will prove in my forthcoming book on the events.[4]

In a kind of rear guard action, Stoltzfus now accuses me of manipulating sources.[5] The charge is not related to my *Central European History* article, but to

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[1] If Stoltzfus had read my article carefully, he would have found the basic documents cited and would not have claimed that I "asserted without evidence that the Rosenstrasse protest was obviously not the cause for the release of the Jews." For the research, see Wolf Gruner, "Die Reichshauptstadt und die Verfolgung der Berliner Juden 1933–1945," in *Jüdische Geschichte in Berlin. Essays und Studien*, ed. by Reinhard Rürup (Berlin: Edition Hentrich, 1995), 229–66, esp. 251–54.

[2] See for example, Wolf Gruner, *Öffentliche Wohlfahrt und Judenverfolgung. Wechselwirkungen lokaler und zentraler Politik im NS-Staat (1933–1942)* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2002); idem, *Zwangsarbeit und Verfolgung. Österreichische Juden im NS-Staat 1938–1945* (Innsbruck, Vienna, and Munich: Studien-Verlag, 2000); see also idem, *Jewish Forced Labor under the Nazis. Economic Needs and Racial Aims, 1938–1944* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming 2005).

[3] See the overview and analysis in Wolf Gruner, "Von der Kollektivausweisung zur Deportation der Juden aus Deutschland. Neue Perspektiven und Dokumente (1938-1945)," in *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Nationalsozialismus, Vol. 20: Die Deportation der Juden aus Deutschland. Pläne, Praxis, Reaktionen 1938–1945* (Göttingen: Wallstein-Verlag, 2004), 21–62.

[4] Wolf Gruner, *Widerstand in der Rosenstraße. Die Fabrik-Aktion und die Verfolgung der "Mischehen" 1943*, (Frankfurt/Main: S. Fischer-Verlag, forthcoming 2005).

[5] How Stoltzfus deals with sources is demonstrated to us by his use of the "Himmler document of November 5, 1942." For Stoltzfus, this decree leaves "little doubt that 'full' Jews in intermarriage wearing the Star of David must go, too." The decree actually dated from October 5, 1942, and focused on the removal of Jewish concentration camp inmates to the concentration camps in

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its German version (2002) where I attached the text of an important Gestapo decree on the organization of the factory raid. Stoltzfus claims that I did not publish this document in its entirety, and that the omitted portions carried "an important indication of the explicit threat to intermarried Jews." In fact, what I "left out" was the cover letter from the German *Landrat* who distributed the Gestapo decree, since his text is identical with the Gestapo one. Stoltzfus not only mistranslates the part cited in his response,[6] but he leaves out the last sentence of the Landrat's letter (also identical with the Gestapo decree), which said: "For possibly arrested Jews responsible interrogation protocols need immediately to be sent to me." This is only understandable as a clear restriction, not as a call for excessive action.[7] In fact, the Gestapo decree ordered the release of the Jews in mixed marriages. The local Gestapo was authorized to put individuals in protective custody only in cases of "impudent behavior." Even in such cases, the Berlin RSHA had to approve every single transfer to a concentration camp.

In general, Stoltzfus does not seem to understand the difference between mass deportation and "protective custody" cases in anti-Jewish policy. Regarding the arrests of seventeen Jewish men in Hamburg, he argues that the Gestapo wanted to pull intermarried Jews gradually into the deportations. In reality, the men were arrested under false charges after their denunciation by a labor office official. They were not deported to Auschwitz during the factory raid.[8] The same distinction must be applied to the dramatic story of twenty-five men from the Rosenstrasse sent to Auschwitz and then brought back. Stoltzfus, who assumes a deportation plan existed, has no convincing explanation for why the twenty-five men were brought to Auschwitz as special protective custody cases and not as deportees, as a report of March 8, 1943 reveals: "Transport from Berlin, Arrival 7. March 43. Total number 690, including twenty-five protective custody cases."[9] Stoltzfus also claims that the (only recently documented)

Auschwitz and Lublin and had nothing to do with deportations. See decree of 5. 10. 1942 (PS-1063), cited in H. G. Adler, *Der verwaltete Mensch. Studien zur Deportation der Juden aus Deutschland* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1974), 253.

[6] Stoltzfus slightly mistranslates the part he delivered in his response: "Anträge auf Unterbringung in einem Konzentrationslager gestellt werden" should not be translated as "preparing papers for their placement in a concentration camp," but rather "to apply for permission to accommodate them in concentration camps."

[7] "Für die evtl. festgenommenen Juden sind mir verantwortliche Vernehmungen der Genannten umgehend zu übersenden;" Brandenburgisches Landeshauptarchiv Potsdam, Pr.Br. Rep. 41 Großräschen, Nr. 272, Bl. 84–85: Decree Gestapo Frankfurt/Oder of February 24, 1943, in letter from Landrat of Calau of February 25, 1943; see Decree of Gestapo Frankfurt/Oder of February 24, 1943, in Wolf Gruner, "Die Fabrik-Aktion und die Ereignisse in der Berliner Rosenstraße. Fakten und Fiktionen um den 27. Februar 1943—60 Jahre danach," in *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung*, 11 (2002), 137–177.

[8] Beate Meyer, *"Jüdische Mischlinge." Rassenpolitik und Verfolgungserfahrung 1933–1945* (Hamburg: Dölling und Galitz, 1999), 58–59.

[9] "Transport aus Berlin, Eingang 7. März 43. Gesamtstärke 690 einschließlich 25 Schutzhäftlinge;" Fernschreiben aus Auschwitz vom 8. 3. 1943 to WVHA, in *Topographie des Terrors.*

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existence of some children inside the building would prove his thesis of a deportation plan for Jews in mixed marriages.[10] Yet even if there had been dozens of children under age fourteen in the Rosenstrasse building, this number would in no way match the real number of children of the two thousand inmates. In contrast, all children of parents registered for deportation were concentrated at the other collection points. Some were even picked up at home. If the Gestapo had wanted to deport the Jews of mixed marriages, the same would have happened with at least several hundred children at the Rosenstrasse. Instead, many of the children participated in the protest outside the building together with their courageous relatives.

The aim of the internment of those Jews, mostly forced laborers and mostly men, was not their deportation, but a different and perfidious goal. Since the RSHA wanted to deport all "full Jews" at this time, they targeted also those one thousand "full Jews" still working at Jewish institutions. To deport those and nevertheless to keep the Jewish institutions working, although on a reduced level, the Gestapo needed unskilled and skilled replacements (lawyers, physicians, nurses, craftsmen) within days. A search using the registry of the labor office as Stoltzfus proposes was neither possible nor appropriate. Since all Jewish forced laborers were recruited regardless of their profession, those files could not be browsed by qualifications. Only the quick selection at the Rosenstrasse Assembly Center allowed the Gestapo then to deport more than 450 former employees plus their families to Auschwitz on March 12 and to Theresienstadt on March 17. Because of the selection process, the internees were not released from Rosenstrasse on a single day, but rather over the course of almost two weeks, already starting on March 1 as I stated in my article. This fact reduces the possibility of a Goebbels intervention on March 6 as the cause for the release of the inmates, and also of the protest of the relatives as a potential reason. Three-quarters of the two thousand Jews of the Rosenstrasse who were not selected for work at the Jewish institutions were then transferred to heavy manual forced labor.

The Nazi leadership's decision in 1943 not to deport Jews in mixed marriages was certainly not intended to ease their living conditions. Deportation always remained an option, but because of their "Aryan" relatives, Hitler and Goebbels at this point still regarded divorce as a basic pseudo legal condition for deportation, as the revived discussion of a corresponding law in March 1943 reveals.[11] If we consider the wider political context in 1943, it does not seem

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Gestapo, SS und Reichssicherheitshauptamt auf dem "Prinz-Albrecht-Gelände." Eine Dokumentation, ed. Reinhard Rürup (Berlin: W. Arenhövel, 1989), 119.

[10] This fact was only recently proven and five children in the Rosenstrasse building identified; Jana Leichsenring, ed., *Frauen und Widerstand* (Münster: Lit, 2003), 136.

[11] Schnellbrief Frick vom 20. 3. 1943 mit Gesetzentwurf, in *Akten der Parteikanzlei der NSDAP*, ed. Institut für Zeitgeschichte (Munich: Saur, 1983), Teil I -Microfiche- Nr. 030740; entry of 21. 3.

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plausible that in Berlin, Jews of mixed marriages should be deported, while even in France, Belgium, and the Netherlands such Jews were still "protected" by Eichmann orders.[12] Eventually, all Jews in mixed marriages *were* to be deported, but in early 1945, in the wake of a lost war, and then to the Ghetto in Theresienstadt.

As I have argued repeatedly, none of this should detract from the heroism of the protestors in the Rosenstrasse, even if their story must ultimately lose its ring of triumph. During the days of one of the biggest Nazi raids, the protesters feared the deportation of their relatives. In fact, they could not know what plans the Nazi leadership had developed for Jews in mixed marriages at this time. We now know much more about the historical facts leading to the events. The protest in the Rosenstrasse, however, still serves us as an illuminating example of individual courage against a dictatorship.

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1943, in *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels*, ed. Elke Fröhlich im Auftrag des Instituts für Zeitgeschichte und mit Unterstützung des Staatlichen Archivdienstes Rußlands, Teil II, Bd. 7 (Munich: Saur, 1993), 603.

[12] Serge Klarsfeld, *Vichy-Auschwitz. Die Zusammenarbeit der deutschen und französischen Behörden bei der "Endlösung der Judenfrage" in Frankreich* (Nördlingen: Delphi Politik, 1989), 202; Bericht an das Auswärtige Amt vom 25. 6. 1943, in *Topographie des Terrors*, 149–50; Richard H. Weisberg, *Vichy Law and the Holocaust in France* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 65, 233–34.

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